



# Early Learning Matters

## December 2015

NJ DEPARTMENTS OF

**EDUCATION**

**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

**HEALTH**

**HUMAN SERVICES**

### Welcome



**Andrea Breitwieser, M.S.**

Welcome to the second issue of Early Learning Matters, a newsletter chronicling the work underway in New Jersey to improve the quality of education and child care for the state's children, from birth to third grade. This work, funded by a federal Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge grant and state dollars, takes a variety of approaches to improve early learning and to support the families of our youngest learners.

This newsletter focuses on Grow NJ Kids ([www.GrowNJKids.com](http://www.GrowNJKids.com)), one of the centerpieces of the state's efforts. Grow NJ Kids has developed a quality rating and improvement system designed to measure strengths and support improvement in child care and early learning programs across the state. We hope you enjoy learning about Grow NJ Kids. The program, spearheaded by the state Department of Human Services, one of four state departments collaborating on the numerous projects within the Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge initiative, represents a critical piece in New Jersey's efforts to help parents improve the ability of their children — our youngest citizens — to learn and achieve success.

**Andrea Breitwieser, M.S.**

Grow NJ Kids Coordinator

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### NJ Kids Rate the Best — Grow NJ Kids

We are surrounded by ratings. Perhaps it's a "PG-13" rating for a movie that leaves it up to you as a parent to decide if your 12-year-old should view it, or a 4-star rating for a film that all the movie critics love. Wouldn't it be great if there were objective ratings for providers of child care and early education? Well, New Jersey is on its way to putting such a rating system into place. Right now, joining the rating system is voluntary for providers, and ratings will not be published until 2016. But with its Grow NJ Kids initiative, New Jersey — along with more than 40 states, including neighboring New York and Pennsylvania — is making a child care and early education rating system a reality.

#### What is Grow NJ Kids?

Grow NJ Kids ([www.GrowNJKids.com](http://www.GrowNJKids.com)) is the name of New Jersey's emerging quality rating and improvement system. It is designed to create universal standards of quality for all child care and early education programs throughout the state. It also allows child care providers and early

educators to showcase to parents and the public their programs' commitment to quality. But it doesn't stop there. Programs will not just be assessed and rated. Rather, participants will be encouraged to make their programs even better through training and other incentives made available to them. That commitment to dynamic and continual improvement is the hallmark of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). A QRIS is a way to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in child care and early education.

#### Who can participate?

The program is open to the full range of child care and early learning providers that are regulated by the state:

- Child care centers
- Family child care programs
- School district preschool programs
- Preschools
- Head Start programs

A newsletter highlighting New Jersey's Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge, a series of coordinated programs focusing on improving statewide access to high-quality early learning and development programs for thousands of high-needs children, birth to age eight.

For more information on the Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge:

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## How does the program work?

After providers enroll through an online registry (at [www.pinjregistry.org](http://www.pinjregistry.org)), they attend an orientation program designed to provide a comprehensive overview of Grow NJ Kids. They next complete a structured self-assessment that provides evidence of how they meet quality standards in five categories:

- Providing a safe, healthy learning environment
- Delivering a quality learning environment and curriculum
- Engaging effectively with families and the community
- Providing opportunities for workforce and professional development
- Demonstrating effective administration and management

Grow NJ Kids provides mentors and coaches to support and guide participants through the program. Child care and early learning program staff members will be eligible for courses and training in order to enhance the quality of their programs. Ultimately, programs will be rated on a 5-star system. After a program has gone through the Grow NJ Kids process and demonstrates “rating readiness,” the program can request a

formal rating visit. In addition to an on-site visit, each program prepares a portfolio of data for review. Programs achieve a star rating — as a 3-, 4- or 5-star program — based on observation, documentation review and a points system.

## What kinds of training and incentives can participants receive?

During the remaining years of the Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge Grant, the program will use funding to provide incentives for improving the quality of child care and early learning programs. These incentives include:

- Classroom improvement grants or incentives for sites to obtain necessary materials and supplies.
- Scholarships for instructional staff and family child care providers.
- Other supports for teachers, including reimbursements for staff attending after-hours training.

Additionally, Grow NJ Kids will reimburse for substitutes for classroom and child care center staff who are taking advantage of training or professional development opportunities.

County	Grow NJ Kids Pilot Programs	2014 Children attending GNJK Pilot Programs	Grow NJ Kids 1st Year Roll-out Programs	2015 Children attending GNJK Programs
Atlantic	—	—	7	672
Bergen	—	—	4	364
Burlington	—	—	13	830
Camden	—	—	6	428
Cape May	—	—	2	116
Cumberland	—	—	23	2994
Essex	16	917	69	4933
Gloucester	—	—	8	306
Hudson	—	—	33	1771
Hunterdon	—	—	11	404
Mercer	—	—	14	827
Middlesex	16	1231	22	1916
Monmouth	—	—	24	1923
Morris	15	1195	20	1302
Ocean	—	—	32	2590
Passaic	—	—	39	4185
Salem	—	—	4	299
Somerset	10	780	13	1132
Sussex	—	—	8	434
Union	—	—	21	1716
Warren	—	—	8	252
TOTALS	57 Pilot	4,123 Children	381 Programs	29,394 Children

## Grow NJ Kids charts growth in last two years.

The Grow NJ Kids “Test Drive” began in 2013. Fifty seven diverse child care and early learning programs in four counties (Essex, Middlesex, Morris and Somerset) participated. The goal is to enroll about 400 sites each year over the life of the grant, for a total approaching 1,800 programs, which will ultimately touch the lives of approximately 83,000 infants and young children. To date there are 438 child care providers enrolled.

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## Who benefits from Grow NJ Kids?

- Children in higher quality early care programs do better in math, language and literacy, all of which are critical to children's school readiness. In addition, children in higher quality early care programs exhibit increased social and emotional development.
- Parents and Caregivers benefit by having easy-to-understand information about the quality of early learning and child care programs to help make the best choices for their child.
- Teachers and providers benefit from additional training that will help to make their programs better and the children in their programs better prepared for school.
- The community benefits by investing in its future leaders, employers, employees and citizens.

## What is the fundamental goal of Grow NJ Kids?

The purpose of Grow NJ Kids is to increase the number of high-quality early learning and child care programs across the state and strengthen the positive effects they have on children's education and school readiness. Scientific evidence and the study of brain development make it increasingly clear that early learning is vital to lifetime learning. With a clear and well-developed road map to early success, New Jersey can give its children the best chances of a lifelong journey to achievement and accomplishment.

## Quick Facts

- Launched with a four-year federal grant, as well as by state dollars
- Participation is voluntary
- 57 early learning/child care programs in four counties participated in a pilot program
- 438 early learning/child care programs and 36 family child care providers are currently enrolled
- Ultimately, approximately 1,800 sites, representing 83,000 infants and young children, will be touched by the program
- Grow NJ Kids provides direct support to each program to help each center maximize its potential
- The program provides accessible and affordable training around the state
- Grow NJ Kids offers incentives, such as enhancement grants, to upgrade classroom materials and supplies, and educational scholarships for staff training
- When centers are ready to undergo evaluation, they will be rated on a 5-Star system
- The state is launching a public awareness campaign to let parents and caregivers know about the new rating system and how they can choose a child care or early learning program that best fits their children's needs

For more information: Go to [www.GrowNJKids.com](http://www.GrowNJKids.com)



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## Selected Resources on the Web:

The Race to the Top program:  
[nj.gov/education/ece/rttt/facts.htm](http://nj.gov/education/ece/rttt/facts.htm)

Grow NJ Kids:  
[GrowNJKids.com](http://GrowNJKids.com)

## Public Awareness Campaign

Grow NJ Kids has been designed to improve the quality of child care and early learning for children across the state. But the success of the program depends in part on making sure parents are aware of what Grow NJ Kids has to offer. That's why New Jersey has launched a multi-year public awareness and advertising campaign to spread the word. This campaign is designed to target parents and caregivers to let them know how participating in the program will benefit their young children and themselves. The first wave of advertising, which rolled out in October, focuses on familiarizing parents with the Grow NJ Kids program and on increasing awareness that quality early learning helps children succeed throughout their lifetimes. The campaign plans to reach parents of young children by advertising in doctors' offices, local convenience stores and laundromats, as well as through ads on public transportation, targeted websites and internet radio stations.

## In the next issue of Early Learning Matters

**Spotlight on family engagement and health connections:** County Councils for Young Children and Central Intake Hubs; also, updates on Pre-K through third-grade initiatives.

## Scholarships Available for Grow NJ Kids Participants

If your program or center is enrolled in Grow NJ Kids and you are a director, teacher or assistant teacher in a child care or education program, or a registered family child care home, you may be eligible for a free scholarship to attend classes at a New Jersey college, university or affiliated training program. Scholarships are available — on a first come, first served basis — for CDA course work, New Jersey Preschool to Third Grade Certification, or Associate's or Bachelor's degrees. To find out if your program or school qualifies, call the scholarship coordinator at (908) 737-4289. Applications are available at [www.pinregistry.org](http://www.pinregistry.org). More information is available at [www.GrowNJKids.com](http://www.GrowNJKids.com).



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**Es mucho más que el baño diario**

Grow NJ Kids trabaja para elevar la calidad del cuidado infantil y del aprendizaje temprano en todo el estado de New Jersey.

Brinda información a los padres para ayudarles a aprovechar al máximo las oportunidades de aprendizaje temprano de sus hijos, incluidos consejos sobre cómo seleccionar el cuidado infantil y programas de aprendizaje temprano de calidad.

Investigaciones muestran que los niños que durante su primera infancia pasan por programas de aprendizaje temprano de calidad, están mejor preparados para el kindergarten con mejores habilidades de lectura, más habilidades en matemáticas y más palabras en su vocabulario.

Visite [GrowNJKids.com](http://GrowNJKids.com) para encontrar recursos para padres de familia.

Departamentos de Niños y Familias, Educación, Salud y Servicios Humanos de New Jersey.

**grow nj kids .com**

**There's no such thing as baby talk**

Grow NJ Kids is working to raise the quality of child care and early learning across the state of New Jersey.

For parents, it provides information to help them make the most of their kids' early learning opportunities, including tips on selecting quality child care and early learning programs.

Research shows that children who are in quality early learning programs when they are young are better prepared for kindergarten with better reading skills, more math skills and larger vocabularies.

Visit [GrowNJKids.com](http://GrowNJKids.com) for parenting resources.

NJ Departments of Children & Families, Education, Health, and Human Services.

**grow nj kids .com**